

Bonjour
Hello

WRHA FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES RESEARCH TIDBITS

Issue 6

Linguistic Minority Communities

LANGUAGE MINORITY

What is an official-language minority community?

An official-language minority community lives in a context where the majority of the population belongs to the other official language group. This is generally the case of Francophones outside Québec and Anglophones in Québec. A community living in a minority setting will often have limited access to services, in particular in the field of health care, depending on the number of people and geographic concentration of the community. It is therefore important to ensure that both official language communities, i.e. French and English-speaking patients, have access to comparable health care services in terms of quality and safety.

DID YOU KNOW?

About 1 million French Canadians live in provinces other than Quebec.

* * * * *

French Canadians once formed a majority of the province of Manitoba. Today, they are about 10 per cent of the population and only two-thirds speak fluent French. The protection of French has been a thorny issue in Manitoba for over 100 years. In 1980 a Supreme Court ruling overturned the previous English-only policy of the Manitoba government. But much of the public appears to oppose recognition of French as an official language and a 1984 attempt to make French and English official languages failed.

FACTS & FIGURES

- ▶ Professionals working in a minority setting often feel lonely and isolated;
- ▶ The low demand for French-language services can have a negative impact on recognizing the need to offer more;
- ▶ Unilingual Anglophones and sometimes Francophones themselves are very seldom aware of the importance of the active offer of health services in both official languages.

Source: Bouchard and Vézina (2009); Bouchard, Vézina, and Savoie (2010)

FRANCOPHONE MINORITY PROFILE

French Canadians are by far Canada's largest minority, numbering 6.8 million people in the 2001 Census, and are considered to be one of the country's three founding nations, along with English Canadians and First Nations people.

TRENDS & ISSUES

A dominant group in a given society will consider minority groups less important (Tajfel, 1978). To protect its positive identity, the minority community will be inclined to view itself as homogenous and consensual. Its members will tend to be more passive, to not stand out, to conform to norms including those of their own group, to turn inward toward their own community, ignoring certain individual differences in order to survive (Hogg & Abrams, 2003). When a person's social identity does not enable a positive self-image to develop, an individual may leave the minority group and join the majority group which is more highly valued and offers additional opportunities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). People may go as far as allowing themselves to be assimilated to ensure they have access to a process of social integration into the new group and to achieve their personal aspirations. Between majority and minority language groups, the number, social status, and economic and political power are unequal; the majority group therefore appears attractive, as it has more resources and makes social insertion easier than the minority group.

Living in an English-dominant North American context, Francophones in official language minority communities face two challenges: the need to navigate daily between French and English, and the challenge to maintain the quality of their language of origin. Some people who are firmly rooted in a minority community speak a French coloured by English words and structures; that is, a nonstandard language, which is used to communicate in familiar settings (Gérin-Lajoie & Labrie, 1999). This language not only marginalizes them, it arouses in them a sense of linguistic insecurity, which in turn leads to individuals (1) having negative reactions toward the way they learned to speak in their home environment; (2) alternating regularly between the minority and majority languages; and (3) making considerable efforts to correct their accents or vocabulary (Desabrais, 2010). Being confronted regularly with the limitations of their language makes them deeply conscious of their minoritization and the forms of language needed to advance to higher levels in the social hierarchy (i.e., standard majority and minority languages).

SOCIAL IDENTITY

Living in a minority community is, in itself, a complex phenomenon. Social identity is constructed through intergroup contacts in which individuals define their identity, to themselves and to others, in relation to the characteristics of their group of origin (Hogg & Abrams, 2003). People from the same group compare themselves favourably to other significant groups, characterizing themselves and their group in positive ways (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Members of a given social group possessing particular assets are highly motivated to preserve them.

TERMINOLOGY

Different terms are used to designate the minority francophone and Acadian communities (FACs). The term "francophones living outside Québec" is probably the most commonly used term. However, representatives of these communities do not like defining themselves as entities living "outside" of something, but rather as a group of communities whose particularity is that they are French-speaking.



PERSPECTIVES ON ASSIMILATION

In this context where two languages are official, Canadians find themselves in different situations:

- ▶ Anglophones outside Québec are in a triple majority. They are a majority within their province, within their country, and their language dominates the continent. It has a global influence like no other has ever had, not even Latin in Antiquity. They have no need for special linguistic protection.
- ▶ Francophones living outside Québec are in a triple minority linguistic situation: within their province, within their country and on the continent. This is a condition they all share, above and beyond very real differences of context. For example, Francophones in New Brunswick are alone in forming one third of their province's population, while Francophones in the other provinces make up no more than 5% of the population (Manitoba 8.6%). Francophones in Manitoba are concentrated geographically in a way that those in Saskatchewan are not. The situation of Francophones in the Ottawa region is different from that of Francophones in Northern Ontario. But these very real differences in no way alter the fact that this triple minority condition of Francophones in all these provinces and territories exposes them to assimilation in the absence of counter-measures.

(Source: Dion, 2002)

RISKS OF ASSIMILATION

Francophone communities across the country are progressively being assimilated. Indeed, according to a 1993 report by Statistics Canada (based on their 1991 census), the pace of assimilation of Francophones across Canada has quickened. The number of Francophones outside Québec who use English at home jumped from 28.5 per cent to 35.1 per cent between 1981 and 1991. In Ontario, home to about half the country's Francophones outside Québec, 37 per cent of those whose maternal language is French use English at home, up from 29 per cent in 1981... In British Columbia, the rate was a staggering 73 per cent in 1991, compared to 52 per cent ten years before. What will be the status of these francophone communities outside Québec in another ten or fifteen years? Clearly, there is cause for concern.

LANGUAGE RIGHTS

"Language rights" and "linguistic human rights" are human rights which have an incidence on language preferences of or use by state authorities, individuals and other entities. Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the section of the Constitution of Canada that guarantees minority language educational rights to French-speaking communities outside Québec. The principles are:

- ▶ Respect the integral place of language rights as human rights;
- ▶ Recognize and promote tolerance, cultural and linguistic diversity and mutual respect, understanding and cooperation among all segments of society;
- ▶ Integrate the concept of Active Offer as an integral part of public services to acknowledge a state's obligation to respect and provide for language rights, so that those using minority languages do not have to specifically request such services but can imminently use them when needs arise.



CANADIAN
CHARTER OF RIGHTS
AND FREEDOMS



OUR COMMITMENT

The Winnipeg Health Region and all its service providers aim to:

- ▶ Improve access to health services in French, including primary health care;
- ▶ Ensure there are an appropriate number of organizations able to provide health services in French, consistent with Ministry standards;
- ▶ Ensure an adequate distribution of health professionals who are able to provide care in French;
- ▶ Provide information and resources in French;
- ▶ Respond to issues of interest and concern;
- ▶ Focus on the Active Offer of services in French;
- ▶ Increase staff awareness about needs of the French-speaking community;
- ▶ Collaborate with Francophone community representatives, and;
- ▶ Facilitate changes to improve the quality of services provided.



RESOURCES

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority French Language Services mandate is:

To assist the WRHA in promoting and providing health services in French in accordance with its French Language Services policies, the Government of Manitoba French Language Services Policy, and regulations established under the legislation governing the Regional Health Authorities of Manitoba.

VIDEO - The importance of Active Offer



VIDEO - What is an Active Offer and why is it so important?



CONTACT US

WRHA FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES

A1153 - 409 Taché Avenue

Winnipeg, MB R2H 2A6

Tel: (204) 235-3986

E-mail: flsfeedback-retroactionslf@sbgh.mb.ca